

Armata y sé violento

Hermosamente violento

Fanning the Flames of Revolt





An Invitation to Revolt...

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Finally, and in order to make way for the future debates and exchanges of ideas, it is necessary to refer to certain aspects present in the street conflict of the Chilean region that, to our knowledge, constitute limitations preventing its expansion and development. Throughout the years, the continuity of street conflict in certain places has resulted in violence becoming routine, inevitably leading to its normalization and self-limiting. Perpetuating methods of street fighting leads us to view it as an end in and of itself, which can express our rebellion without major inconveniences. We believe that it is essential to constantly break barriers, sharpen our ideas and innovate strategies and tactics necessary for the advancement and deepening of the street conflict.

[I] – Generally, these are sectors located at the outskirts of the big cities, elsewhere known as slums. Their residents are the historically exploited refuse of society.

[ii] – Communities such as La Victoria in Santiago de Chile have their origins in the struggle for housing initiated by people who arrived to the metropolis from the countryside. Since its founding (in the '50s) its inhabitants have lived in constant struggle on many fronts – fighting for basic necessities like water, sewage, pavement, etc. inevitably leads to facing repression. Many of these towns were very active before and during the dictatorship, carrying out community experiments and championing autonomous problem-solving. The armed organizations that fought Pinochet realized a monumental political undertaking in these places, where they often established bases and safe houses. This continues to play an important part of the historical memory of the population, a memory that continues to reinvent itself according to contemporary conflicts.

[iii] – On March 29, 1983, the brothers Rafael and Eduardo Vergara Toledo, militants of the armed Left Revolutionary Movement (MIR), were assassinated by national police inside of a cop car. This date is known as the “Day of the Youth Combatant”, where these murders are commemorated through clashing with police and the destruction of property in different parts of Santiago.

[iv] – In 2011 the government intended to build five hydroelectric plants in the south of Chile, against which there were massive, violent protests.

their daily life. It also allows them to visualize goals that were previously believed unattainable. Undoubtedly, it enables a kind of personal growth that is impossible to find in the boring everyday life of a pacified wage slave. These instances of street conflict have led many comrades to take their first steps in the path of confrontation and illegal lifestyle. They are spaces of learning in which strategies and tactics are shared, reproduced and, in some cases, further developed and deepened. In recent years we have seen how young college students, inspired by their participation in mass protests, have undertaken actions of autonomous and combative violence withing the same school precincts. These have included street blockades and confrontations with the police in solidarity with anarchist prisoners or in remembrance of comrades who died in the struggle. This is just one example of the scope of anarchist street fighting in the Chilean region. The contradictions of living withing society, with all it entails, generates different tensions that vary in intensity according to specific circumstances and situations;. The tension, therefore, is always present in one way or another, expressing itself in different ways. Clearly, street battles are a manifestation of this tension, corresponding to an explosive rejection of domination, either against something or someone or against the entire existing order. It is from this perspective that anarchist street violence has a lot to say and, at times, has done so in order to prolong and sharpen tensions. As pointed out by an anarchist group from Greece amidst the insurrectionary process of December 2008, "In the middle of a strong social conflict, you escalate the tension of attack". Moving beyond the specific situation that caused a disturbance, our duty is that the flame does not go out, but rather that it grows and spreads, building up tension through street combat, and increasingly breaking away from the established order. Because we understand that anarchism, far from being something that is accomplished, is first and foremost a type of tension.

SNAPSHOT OF A DAY OF STREET FIGHTING

Watch attentively. Wait. The demonstration unfolds in relative calm. Slogans, chants and the flags of different tendencies express distinct identities of struggle; some against capitalism, others against the system, and still others against the entirety of domination and the established order. Little by little they cover their faces and begin to use the materials at hand; paint, hammers and molotov cocktails. They agree on a code word that they can call out in case they get lost in the maelstrom of street combat. It's simple: scream the name in question, regroup and continue on the warpath. Other groups do the same. They stay cautious of attacks from police and the *ciudadanismo* of the left, so common at these demonstrations. They throw bottles full of paint at a nearby cop car, a molotov cocktail at the riot police and another at a bank. At the opposite end of the street, a girl, no more than 20 years old, hammers the window of a pharmacy to smithereens. They set fire to dumpsters and trash cans and make improvised barricades. Flames and tear gas become protagonists of the day. Shaken and content, they leave before the riot subsides...

Later in the night, they go to the peripheries of Santiago de Chile, to a suburb with a long history of struggle, where they quickly prepare for a new confrontation. But the occasion calls for different tools. Along with molotov cocktails they also carry handguns, revolvers, pistols and antique shotguns, to attack the police. The glow of a molotov cocktail in the middle of the street lights up the barricades and announces that the battle has begun. A police water cannon approaches and is instantly welcomed by a terrifying wave of fire, forcing it to retreat. Slowly but surely, flames give way to intermittent gun bursts targeted at police on the other side of the avenue who return fire with high caliber weapons. They do not

charge. Cautious and fearful, they wait. As the night winds down, energies start to deplete. Their materials run out which puts a natural end to an intense day of fighting.

CHARACTERISTICS AND PARTICULARITIES OF STREET FIGHTING IN THE CHILEAN REGION

Protests and demonstrations are something of a constant across Chilean territory, varying in intensity, demands, and strategic objectives depending on the socio-political moment from which they emerge. Although it is not our intent to delve into a historical account of these protests, we believe it is necessary to make reference to certain specifics so as to clarify an overview of the topic.

From the story above, it can be surmised that, generally, there are two settings in which large scale street fighting takes place: the streets and thoroughfares of major city centers and the suburbs^[1] at the periphery of Santiago, each with its distinct elements and characteristics. The first are carried out in the morning and the latter, more intense and undeniably riskier actions, take place at night, sometimes even continuing until dawn. These confrontations don't happen just anywhere. They are present in communities with histories of struggle dating back to the dictatorship and earlier, where inhabitants have immense experience in the face of repression, and have developed strategic mechanisms with which to confront it. Many of them have immersed themselves in dynamics of combat, which, among other outcomes, has created a shared identity of hostility, constantly re-elaborated through conflict.^[1]

Another defining characteristic of street combat in Chilean territory is the celebration of specific moments of struggle. Commemorations of the military coup (September 11, 1973) and the

CREATE THE CONFLICT, SHARPEN THE TENSION

"Violent action is always partially defined by play, the pursuit of fun and the pleasure taken in attacking those who oppress us. It is a simple practice that everyone can take up. Power is demystified through attack. The facade of peace and social control is shattered. The more recurrent and constant the clashes, the more revolt and a climate of social tension can be maintained. Let's practice vandalism. No act of revolt is blind or useless."

-Anonymous, Citizens, Not Beyond the Student Movement

Street violence, conceived of and practiced as a tool of attack that seeks to break open the citizenry's ideas of normalcy, can open the unknown and unsuspected possibilities. There is no certainty as to what the proliferation of riots will bring.

However, far from stopping us, this only motivates and excites us. Being on the offensive means being provocative inasmuch as it allows us to create and dream up conditions for confrontation. This necessarily implies the use of our imagination, which taking the reins of our actions, breaks with the habit of waiting that leaves the revolt out to ruse. Understand, therefore, that it is not necessary to receive the blows of the police in order to act, but rather that the attack on power is always and everywhere justified. Trying to create cracks in the established order is always valid, if only for the fact that we want to be in control of our own lives.

An important aspect of street confrontation is that it represents an individual and collective experience of breaking with legality. It is a leap towards the transgression of that which is imposed upon us, during which our restraints are overcome and our horizons broaden. Carrying out violent initiatives allows the individual to look at their surroundings in a different light; it allows them to start down a path of re-appropriating their own existence and taking control of

And if the intended purpose is not achieved, does the struggle in the streets lose its validity? To maintain that street fighting in all of its breadth and complexity is only valid when it achieves a specific demand asks us to overlook a series of important dimensions related to the experience of transgressing the law. It dismisses the vital need to nurture and proliferate the fight against authority at any given time and place. On the other hand, by settling for only partial victories we refuse to take up a position of war against domination insofar as we circumscribe the conflict and the confrontation to a specific event or problem, rejecting the commitments necessary for the destruction of the existing order. Nonetheless this has led to the government to back down and abandon specific plans, many times. Another example is the constant changes in education laws which have led to violent student demonstrations in recent years.

Sometimes this resistance comes attached to proposals of a reformist nature, as they intend to beautify the system, to make it more human and habitable. Settling for partial victories and becoming stagnant inevitably reinserts us into civil society, transforming our struggle into one more link in the chain of domination.

Day of the Youth Combatant (March 29, 1985)^[iii] see violent protest repeated, year after year, regardless of the government on duty. It is not just political groups of different varieties that participate. Thousands of people take part in the riots, whether in the centers of the cities or on the outskirts, crowds attack both property and the police. They produce a carnivalesque environment in which individuals spontaneously unleash their passions, destroying what upsets them about everyday life. In addition to the protests carried out at these commemorations, there are many others that have given way to violent disturbances at increasing rates. What a few years ago would have been a peaceful march, today has become an excuse for street fighting.

Alongside these two settings, there is another which is no less important: the universities. These spaces of study have seen combat in the streets for decades; where a great many people have taken their first steps towards theoretical and practical confrontation. What distinguishes these sites of conflict is that the violence which takes place in them isn't exclusively provoked by student issues or demands. In fact few are determined by this. The motive behind the conflict can vary greatly. Among these are the freedom for prisoners of the social war, the self-determination of the Mapuche people, responses to repressive operations, marking the death or assassination of a comrade, and so on. Therefore, universities constitute an area of general struggle, where anarchist affinity groups play a permanently active, and important role.

UNFINISHED VISIONS AND POSITIONS

Violent street fighting is a reality. Its trajectory and constant presence are undeniable. Although at times there is relative calm, and citizens traverse the streets blinded by consumerism; a break away always occurs (as we saw recently in Hamburg). Normality is altered

and riots take the floor once more. What is the purpose of this type of practice?

What is achieved by destroying property and attacking the police? There are different ways of understanding the phenomenon of street violence; according to its usefulness, objectives, or direction. However, it is not within the scope of this article to address any of these, or to resort to pathetic pacifist posturing, in the style of the “Indignadxs” of the 15M-Movement, that only knows how to exalt victimhood. Nonetheless, we believe it is necessary to shed light on some of these considerations to the extent that they clarify our position on the topic in question.

For example, approaches that understand the fight in the streets as a means of self defense against a repressive state have had a broad field of influence over the years. This argument is premised on the supposition that the violence of those who protest is legitimate only when it is carried out as a response to aggressions that prevent dissent and maintain social control. Protests, in this sense, are essentially peaceful demonstrations that reject some particularity or another without altering the consistency of civil society and staying within certain discursive limits imposed by power. From this point of view, street violence can only be justified when it is used as a means to repel police repression; never as an offensive gesture that intend to break with the established order, even if just for a second. Here, we see the basis for an understanding of the conflict in the streets that is intimately linked to citizen demands for social rights. Ultimately, this seeks to defend the right to peacefully assemble and exercise freedom of speech, both principles which are similarly understood as being in danger of being trampled by repression. This mentality is fine with the fences and barriers that delimit the protest, happy with the route that is imposed onto it, and accepts the provocative presence of the police without question. While not being overtly pacifist, this position is nonetheless passive. It waits for events to develop before

reacting and does not provoke instances of rupture because they prove uncomfortable. It prioritizes the stultifying calm which shatters when an attack gives way to the riots. From within this framework, violence of an offensive character cannot be considered valid practice by the proponents of self-defense. Moreover, they repress it harshly, often with the help of those who claim to be their enemies: the police.

Another position, at times related to the one above, is an analysis which understands street fighting solely as a tool to achieve certain demands, that is, as a means of pressure to achieve a concrete objective. There have been countless violent protests demanding free, quality education, the closure or halting of a dam or mining project, or the repeal of some law ... and so on to infinity to the demands that have lead to street combat of a great or small intensity. The idea is that more people participate in the riots, the greater the intensity, the more likely the possibilities of achieving a desired objective. It is not our intention to criticize this way of seeing street conflict, since it often turns out to be effective, but rather to point out its partial character. Constant and prolonged violence in the street has, on several occasions, forced governments in this corner of South America to back down, giving way to partial yet significant victories. These moments represent concrete impulses to continue and deepen different struggles.^[iv] This lifts the spirit and rekindles energies.

Those who participated in these moments, and many who observed from afar understand that the eventual victories were due to violent actions carried out in the streets. However, we think that focusing only on this instrumental aspect leads us to self-limit our expressions of rebellion, and prevent them from spreading like wildfire. In this way, the prospect of unleashing of passions into an open field of possibilities is stopped in its tracks.

Are we going to settle for partial victories? Once the immediate objectives have been achieved, does street violence stop making sense?